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Educational Potential of Animated Films in Poland

In his *Dziesiąta muza* [The Tenth Muse], Karol Irzykowski expressed a view that animation makes film deserve the status of art and should soon determine its uniqueness (1924, pp. 215–218). Irzykowski thus predicted the essential role of animation, which – even though it is still often treated as secondary to live-action film – sets the pace in the development of special effects¹ and remains one of the essential elements of new media (e.g. mappings and video installations). For the last couple of decades, it has probably been the most important field of formal experimentation in film.² In animation, it seems, the realm of creative possibility is even greater than in other types of cinematic art (which was also predicted by Irzykowski). If we agree with Irzykowski's opinion, based on the versatility of animation and its potential for exploring the artistic opportunities offered by films (1924, pp. 212, 218), it should logically follow that, apart from its aesthetic and artistic merits, animation provides a perfect tool for education regarding animation itself, but also cinema in broad terms.

Any reflection concerning the educational potential of Polish animation requires a short introduction accounting for the specificity of the local market – presenting the main agencies responsible for its development, as well as the major sources of funding. All over the world, animation is promoted through film schools, workshops, conferences, industry events and festivals. These will be presented as important aspects influencing the Polish animation industry. Discussing them in more detail, I will try to prove that in almost every sphere we can now notice either new initiatives or intensification of the existing efforts. Some well-known and appreciated projects receive financial support from the Polish Film Institute (Polski

¹ See e.g. Jerry Beck, *Animation Art. From Pencil to Pixel, the World of Cartoon, Anime and CGI* (2004).

² Experiments with classical form and content of films are visible especially in television series produced by large animated film studios. Good examples are, for instance, *The Emperor's New School* (2006–2008, Mark Dindal) or *Phineas and Ferb* (2007–2015, Jeff Marsh, Dan Povenmire). The experimental potential of animation is also discussed by David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson in their *Film Art. An Introduction* (1990, p. 347–353).

Instytut Sztuki Filmowej, PISF); there are new festivals and new institutions such as Stowarzyszenie Producentów Polskiej Animacji [Polish Animation Producers Association] (SPPA), whose aim is to support Polish animation in general. The example of the SPPA and the festivals sheds more light on the two-dimensional development of the industry. On the one hand, we can observe a tendency for institutional unification of producers and artists (active within the SPPA) and fans (brought together by festivals such as the Animator Festival in Poznań); on the other hand, more and more important events have grassroots origins (Roch Sulima labels these as “spontaneous”, 2002, p. 72), which makes them more related to the promotion of culture. These two tendencies are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary, each in their turn increasing the educational potential of animation, as I will attempt to prove.

One important area for my present discussion is festival studies, especially as far as animated film festivals are concerned. My suggestion would be that we consider Polish animation with its educational potential as a field-configuring event. In their article devoted to the animation festival in Annecy, Bernard Leca, Charles-Clemens Rüling and Dominique Puthod define the term “field-configuring event” as a convergence of key elements for the evolution of a given discipline: presenting new products, sharing information, developing new working standards, networking, gathering information about recent progress within a given industry and finally negotiating new contracts (2015, p. 174).

Even though it usually denotes one specific event crucial for the development of a given discipline of art or business in its original context, the term “field-configuring event” (within the Polish context the best example of such an event would be the aforementioned Animator Festival), can be extended to refer to all phenomena occurring in the Polish animation industry. Making this shift, however, we should ask ourselves the following questions: to what extent do individual events influence the changes in the Polish animation industry and how far can the entire industry collectively determine its future goals? Provided that we can put aside the meaning of the word “event” and treat it as something interspersed rather than centralised, we may perceive the Polish animation industry as a group who has developed an incoherent but still clearly existing annual calendar focused on meetings, information sharing and presenting new works. This calendar is governed, among other things, by the PISF application deadlines, workshops, festivals and conferences, as well as the initiation of new groups of students of animation. I will try to present all these aspects as elements of a broadly understood field-configuring event. Such an understanding of Polish animation would not be possible, however, without the aforementioned SPPA – an organisation founded in 2013, which contributes much effort to making the entire industry speak with one voice. I will also try to show the uniqueness of another initiative, O!PLA Ogólnopolski Festiwal Polskiej Animacji [the O!PLA Festival of Polish Animation], which I will discuss in detail in the final section of my article. As a steadily growing event, O!PLA is an excellent example of taking advantage of the possibilities stemming from grassroots initiatives aimed at

popularising film. At the same time, even though O!PLA complies with the definition of a field-configuring event at least to some extent, in many other respects it transcends it, becoming an efficient platform for the promotion of culture.

But before coming to that point, it seems worthwhile to discuss the dynamics of animation-related initiatives worldwide. In the United States, as well as in Western Europe, much stress is placed on educating animation artists and the entire genre is promoted by numerous festivals. The website *Animationcareerreview.com* advertises animation as a field of study and an attractive profession, listing 100 leading academies offering animation courses. A few dozen American institutions made the list but five others are located in France, three in the UK, two in Germany and two in Czechia (animation at FAMU and the Anomalia School) (Wilding, 2012). Animation is also made popular by film studios which discover and educate talented artists. Apart from American and Japanese studios there are some very successful European ones, such as Folimage in France (the producer of the Oscar-nominated film *A Cat in Paris* [2010, dir. Jean-Loup Felicoli, Alain Gagnol]) and Cartoon Saloon in Ireland (co-created by the two-time Oscar nominee Tomm Moore). Much promotion is done by festivals (the most important among those are organised in Annecy, Leipzig and Utrecht). Keenly attended by industry members and fans alike, the festivals provide an overview of the world of animation.

The Role of the PISF in the Development of the Polish Animation Industry

Like virtually all other initiatives linked to producing and promoting Polish films, animated films also often rely financially (and for patronage) on the Polish Film Institute (PISF). The crucial role of the PISF for the development of Polish cinema is indisputable, although – as with any other state institution – it occasionally arouses controversy.³

In the introduction to her article titled *Raport o producentach polskiej animacji* [A Report on Polish Animation Producers], Anna Wróblewska writes: “Animated film producers do not have it easy. Every year during the Krakow Film Festival [...] the issue of animation is brought up. Time and again, the same problems are discussed: lack of funding, lack of distribution channels, lack of promotion” (2010, p. 10). It is thus worth mentioning some aspects of the PISF’s financing of animation projects, as funds allocated to this type of films can give one a good measure of the attitude of the entire film industry. Among the PISF’s priorities one specifically mentions animated films. Nevertheless, animated film projects receive much less funding than live-action films, similar at best to that allocated to documentary

³ Such was the case, for instance, with some expert committees, financing regulations or choices regarding films to receive funding (Newsweek.pl, 2015; Wojcieszek, Guskowski, 2011).

films.⁴ At the same time, the production of animated films is usually costly and time-consuming (Wróblewska, 2010, p. 11), which can be proven by the list of ten most expensive films ever made published by *Forbes*, where *Tangled* (2010, dir. Nathan Greno, Byron Howard) ranks 3rd (Berg, 2016). In addition, almost all other films to have made that list make an extensive use of animated special effects. The costs of making a full-length animated film are often beyond the reach of Polish artists, and the few independent attempts that have been made involved a large degree of compromise and strict budgeting, which took its toll on the pictures' artistic quality. Such was the case with *Gwiazda Kopernika* [Copernicus' Star] (2009, dir. Zdzisław Kudła, Andrzej Orzechowski) and *Jak uratować mamę* [How to Save Mum] (2015, dir. Daniel Zduńczyk, Marcin Męczkowski). As a result, young audiences in Poland learn about animation by watching films released by the Walt Disney Company (e.g. Pixar Studio) and DreamWorks Animation as well as television channels such as the Disney Channel or Cartoon Network. The pattern is much the same with animated films addressed at adults. Most artists prefer to invest in independent short films, which ultimately have limited viewership (distributed at festivals or broadcast on TVP Kultura channel as part of the "Animation Now" cycle) but their relatively limited budgets (from a few hundred thousand to a couple of million PLN) make them more likely to receive substantial funding from the PISF.⁵

The animation and documentary film sections of the Polish Filmmakers Association both express their discontent with the fact that despite a 2013 agreement to observe the following quota in distributing funds among film projects: live-action feature films – 70%; animated films – 18%; documentary films – 12%, the PISF tends to use other criteria and allocate more funds to live-action feature films. In 2016, during the Forum on Documentary and Animated Films organised as part of the Krakow Film Festival, members of the animation and documentary film sections of the Polish Filmmakers Association signed a document addressed to the head of the PISF, Magdalena Sroka, urging her to respect the 30% quota for documentary and animated films (Wróblewska, 2016). It seems that some hope for full-length animated film projects can be found in a new category for the PISF funding applications: Films for young viewers and families, introduced in 2016.⁶

Spreading information about animated films largely depends on workshops, cultural events and festivals, hence it is worth taking a look at how animation-

⁴ For example, in the second application-evaluation session in 2016, animation-related projects were allocated just under PLN 3 million, while live-action films received almost PLN 10 million (Pisf.pl, 2016).

⁵ As *Badanie polskiego rynku animacji* [A Survey of the Polish Animation Industry] and *VFX. Raport końcowy 2015* [VFX. 2015 Final Report] (p. 16) suggest, the potential of Polish animation film studios is not sufficiently explored.

⁶ So far, two full-length animated films have received funding: *Pelican* (PLN 2 million against PLN 13 million of its total budget) and *Święto Muminków* [The Moomins' Holiday] (PLN 200,000 against over PLN 2 million total budget). Data from 23 June 2016, after two application evaluation sessions (Pisf.pl).

related initiatives are faring within the Education and Distribution programme, whose five categories include those that cover animation-related events. The first one of those is Film education and professional training, where an increase can be noted in terms of funds allocated to animation. While in 2014 and 2015 only two animation-related projects received funding (Pisf.pl), including Munk Studio (which supervises, among others, the Young Animation programme, focused on helping short animated film debuts), in 2016 six projects were successful (Pisf.pl), including the 24th International Animated Film Workshop in Cracow and Lanckorona (focused on training various skills involved in animated film production) and the Animation and Film Education workshop organised by Studio Miniatur Filmowych [Short Film Studio], open to everyone interested. Both events have pure educational value. Animation and Film Education is especially interesting due to its form of a travelling workshop – visiting small towns and encouraging local communities to learn filmmaking techniques, which also makes them more conscious viewers.⁷ This strategy is similar to that used by the O!PLA festival, which I will describe in more detail in the final part of the present article.

Every year, funds are allocated to: Ale Kino! International Young Audience Film Festival (as well as its “travelling” version, supported by local initiatives), Etiuda & Anima in Cracow and Animator in Poznań – all these involve screenings of animated films. The PISF also co-finances other events addressed at children and teenagers. In 2016, these included (apart from the abovementioned Ale Kino! Festival), Kids Film Festival organised by the New Horizons Association, KINOLUB organised by the IKS foundation and Cinema in Sneakers of the Cinemania foundation, as well as some local initiatives such as Kino Jazda [Go Cinema] festival in Nowy Sącz (Pisf.pl).

Increasingly often, the PISF expresses its recognition for animation-related initiatives when it is distributing its yearly awards: the Ale Kino! festival was distinguished as the event of the year 2011, while in 2013 the same title was awarded to the Etiuda & Anima festival; the award for the best film-related book of the year 2011 was given to *Z Armatą na Wilka. Animowany blues Mariusza Wilczyńskiego* [The Animated Blues of Mariusz Wilczyński] by Jerzy Armata, while the best educational projects for young viewers in 2013 were: Animation for All and Polish Animation Garden workshop (Pisf.pl).

A Unified Vision of Polish Animation behind the Activities of the SPPA

Stowarzyszenie Producentów Polskiej Animacji [Polish Animation Producers Association, SPPA] is an independent body undertaking actions complementary to the ones conducted by the PISF. Established in 2013 and uniting most Polish

⁷ The main ideas behind the Animation and Film Education for All are explained in an interview published on the PISF website by Eugeniusz Gordziejuk, the manager for film promotion, education and reconstruction at Studio Miniatur Filmowych [Short Film Studio] (Pisf.pl, 2014).

animation producers, the SPPA is probably the best example of field-configuring. The association provides a unique opportunity for institutions such as Platige Image, Studio Miniatur Filmowych [Short Film Studio] and Human Ark to make their standpoints heard. The main objectives of the SPPA are as follows:

The association's main objective is to unite animation producers with a view to promoting a positive and attractive image of Polish animated films in Poland and abroad with special focus on contemporary animation. This involves integration of the animated film producers circle, arranging support for Polish producers of animated films in order to obtain foreign co-producers and distributors, supporting young and talented filmmakers, promoting animated films for children and teenagers, as well as bringing up and educating future animation viewers (Sppa.eu).

From the very beginning, the SPPA has actively been promoting Polish animation abroad as well as encouraging industry members at home to be more involved in similar actions. As early as 2014, the SPPA took part in the MIFA International Animated Film Festival in Annecy. In 2015, the Association co-organised the Visegrad Animation Forum, where artists, producers and distributors from Eastern and Central Europe could share their ideas; in 2016, it represented Polish animation at the MIPCOM fair in Cannes. The SPPA is also a partner of the Visual Art Film Animation conference in Warsaw as well as the initiator of ANIMARKT – a cycle of industry events accompanying the AnimArt festival (organised since 2015), devoted to both film animation and theatre animation techniques.

Another important initiative of the SPPA – in co-operation with the PISF and Film Commission Poland – consists of a survey on the Polish animation market, the results of which were published in early 2016. The survey was focused mainly on multidimensional (technical, promotional) opportunities for the development of animation and special effects. In addition, the SPPA spreads information about all initiatives linked with Polish animation, mostly through its Facebook page.

Animation within the Polish Higher Education System

Undoubtedly, at the heart of the Polish animation industry lie higher educational institutions which offer schooling for future animation artists. The key Polish academies in this respect are the Film School in Lodz and the University of Arts in Poznań (UAP). In Lodz, the degree programme in animated films and film special effects is offered by the Photography and Television Production department; courses are taught by, among others, Piotr Dumala, Józef Robakowski, Marek Skrobecki and Mariusz Wilczyński. The excellent reputation of the Film School in Lodz is well deserved, which is best proven by the films supervised by the school: *Film, że mucha nie siada* [Fly] (2005, dir. Michał Poniedziałki), *Drżące trąby* [Shivering Trunks] (2010, dir. Natalia Brożyńska) and *Casting* (2011, dir. Kacper Zamarło). All these productions give testimony to the growing role of

the Internet in promoting seemingly niche animated films as well as the extent of interest in productions made with the use of techniques other than those preferred by American box office hits.

The beginnings of the Animation Department at the University of Arts in Poznań are connected with the activity of Kazimierz Urbański – a distinguished educator and one of the leading Polish animation artists. The UAP was the first higher education institution to develop structures focused solely on animation: first, a chair in animation was created (2002), then an MA programme in animation was offered (2012) and in 2014, an independent Department of Animation was called into existence.

Animation is also taught and studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow where there is an animation workshop. The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin offers a postgraduate programme in computer animation and film etude. There are also private schools educating animation artists; separate programmes are offered by, amongst others: the Multi Art Academy in Cracow (VFX computer animation and 3D animation), Collegium Da Vinci in Poznań (classical and film animation), Policealne Studium Plastyczne AnimaArt [AnimaArt Post-Secondary School] in Cracow (film animation and graphic design techniques), Animatricks in Warsaw (3D animation, special effects, motion capture), the Polish-Japanese Academy of Information Technology (multimedia, 3D animation). There seems to be a clear distinction between public schools, which are more focused on classical animation, and private ones, which are better equipped and more focused on teaching computer animation techniques.

Film Animation Workshops

Animation education is largely based on workshopping. During more or less extensive workshops devoted to this particular kind of cinema, young people and adults learn how to watch animated films and also how to make them. It is impossible to enumerate all the different initiatives, some of which focus on film education through integrating local communities, while others prioritise gathering information from other fields (i.e. learning through collecting material for future films through, for instance, ethnographic research such as in the Sejny Chronicles [Kroniki Sejneńskie] project).

Usually, animation workshops accompany film festivals. Such is the case with the Animator festival in Poznań, which offers a wide range of practical animation workshops (Animacja w praktyce [Animation in Practice]) as well as the Animator jutra [Animating Tomorrow] cycle addressed at children. During the T-Mobile New Horizons Festival in Wrocław animation artists and teachers can participate in the New Horizons Summer Academy (Letnia Akademia Nowe Horyzonty). Workshop workshops for professional animation artists are organised by the StopTriK festival and held in Poland or in Slovenia, as the festival

takes place in Maribor as well as in Polish towns (so far it has been hosted by Niepołomice, Bielsko-Biała and Łódź [2016]).

The FAZY International Animated Film Workshop links learning with integration, offering young people from a number of countries an opportunity to work together. The main objective is not only to let them experience art but also work with people from different cultural backgrounds. Regular animation workshops are organised by the Se-Ma-For Animation Museum in Łódź, the guardian of the legacy of the Se-Ma-For film studio,⁸ including set designs for its two Oscar-winning films: *Tango* (1982, dir. Zbigniew Rybczyński) and *Peter and the Wolf* (2007, dir. Suzie Templeton).

An important cultural and community function is performed by one of the Borderland Foundation in Sejny's projects: the Sejny Chronicles. It involves a cycle of workshops focused on producing short animated etudes, subsequently compiled as *Opowieści Pogranicza* [Borderland Tales]. So far, four editions have been released. Workshop participants need to engage in creative, conceptual work but also have to learn how to communicate with other team members. Meetings with senior inhabitants allow the participants to discover the region's rich history and tradition; later on, the senior inhabitants serve as narrators in the animated stories. In this way, a unique cross-generational cooperation takes place. Thus the project serves many goals at once. On the one hand, it helps young people explore their interests, which is often invaluable in such economically-challenged regions; on the other hand, it helps preserve local traditions. The project is a textbook example of choosing the right method and relying on the empathy of a guest animation artist for the place where they are coming to work.⁹ The artists involved in the project describe their experience as follows: "Our work in Sejny began with our curiosity as newcomers to discover and name the town" (*Pogranicze.sejny.pl*). This desire was not self-centred, however, and the artists gave voice to the people they were working with. As Dorota Piwowarska writes in *Teraz! Animacja kultury* [Now! Culture Promotion]: "Every animation situation involves an element [...] of meeting, coming across a different, hitherto unknown way of thinking, learning about the rules governing a community, a culture which seems exotic to us [...]. It's all about perceiving this otherness as valuable..." (Piwowarska, 2008, p. 8). As a result, the Sejny Chronicles project has multi-layered educational potential in terms of film as well as regional culture and traditions.

The large variety of workshops on offer proves that we need to be open-minded about education through film animation. Sometimes the workshops, regardless of whether they are addressed at professionals or amateurs, are focused solely on film-

⁸ The role of the Se-Ma-For Museum as the guardian of the studio's historical and cultural legacy is discussed in detail by Ewa Ciszewska in her article *The Se-Ma-For Film Studio from 1990 to 1999* (2015).

⁹ The project is described in detail in Dorota Sieloń-Gałusek's article *Sejny – centrum świata* [Sejny – the Centre of the World] (2010).

making (e.g. Animator jutra, Workshot). More and more often, however, animation becomes a medium which makes it possible not only to convey knowledge regarding certain art tools, but also an understanding of complex socio-cultural processes (e.g. FAZY, the Sejny Chronicles). The above examples show that animation can become an educational platform which is not self-centred, but rather allows people to gain other knowledge and skills.

Animation Festivals

Another way of reaching the audiences directly is organising festivals. Apart from film screenings, festivals offer workshops, meetings with artists, discussion panels and conferences. As Peter Bosma points out, even though events such as festivals bring together audiences, critics, artists, producers and distributors, creating an animation film festival is no easy task (Bosma, 2015) and requires an original idea that could provide an entertaining formula for the whole event. A similar point is made by Leca, Rüling and Puthod, who comment that diversification of form and content of proposed events seems to be the key to success (2015, s. 175). This requirement is clearly met by Polish festivals focusing on various phenomena occurring in animation in Poland and abroad.

In Poland, animation festivals have been organised for almost a quarter of a century, but the last couple of years have seen them reach their peak. The most important event is the Etiuda & Anima Festival, organised in Cracow since 1994, which has two international contests. One of them includes film etudes made by animation students as well as their diploma works, while the other is open for all animated films: student, independent and professional productions alike.¹⁰ The programme includes a number of thematic sections as well as workshops for children and professional filmmakers.

Another important festival is the Polish Festival of Animated Films d'Auteur (Ogólnopolski Festiwal Autorskich Filmów Animowanych, OFAFA) in Cracow, which attempts to summarise the developments in Polish animation in every passing year. The festival holds contests in the following categories: professional films, films for children, student etudes and amateur films. Similarly to Etiuda & Anima, the OFAFA provides an opportunity to organise retrospectives, discussions, exhibitions and meetings with artists.

In the last nine editions the Animator Festival have gained the position of the largest animation-related event in Poland. The first edition of the festival was organised in 2008 to celebrate the 60th anniversary of animation in Poland. The one-week-long festival boasts not only its scale and the number of films being screened (over 300), but also the variety of accompanying events. Apart from two contests (short and full-length films), there are retrospectives, special screenings, Animator cycle addressed at children, screenings with live music, and a scholarly conference

¹⁰ Both categories impose the length limit of 30 minutes.

on animation-related issues (2014 – Women in animation; 2015 – Otherness, 2016 – Dolls). Last but not least, there are workshops (discussed above).

Two younger and slightly smaller initiatives are ANIMOCJE [Animotions] in Bydgoszcz and the Polish-Slovenian festival StopTrik (both festivals have been organised for six years now). Modelling itself on the Animator festival, ANIMOCJE attempts to develop a similar platform for bringing together artists and audiences. The festival also lasts for one week; its international film contest is accompanied by a range of workshops, discussions, concerts, exhibitions and theatre performances. The scale of the event is still smaller than that of Animator but its creativity and variety draws larger audiences every year. In this respect it is worth mentioning the initiator and coordinator of the festival, Weronika Płaczek, whose original and cohesive vision of the event (placing emphasis on creativity and innovative use of animation techniques) contributed to creating a festival that successfully promotes this discipline of film.

Similarly interesting is StopTrik – the only European festival devoted solely to stop motion animation. It has been organised in Poland since 2012 (all previous editions took place in Maribor). At present, most accompanying events are doubled in Slovenia and in Poland. The organisers admit that the festival began as a grassroots initiative and from the very outset it was committed to international partnership, hence its many European partners, including Etiuda & Anima and O!PLA (Stoptrik.eu).

Last but not least, there is Krakow Film Festival, which from its very beginning (i.e. from 1961) included animation next to short live-action and documentary films. Over the years, the name of the prize for the best animated film has changed – initially, it was Wawel Dragon, then Golden Dragon; for a number of years there was no separate prize in animation at all. But from 2007 onwards, Silver Dragons can be won in the international animation contest, whereas Silver Lajkoniks await the authors of the best Polish animation. Animation artists have also received special honorary awards at the KFF – the Dragons of Dragons. These included Jan Lenica, Jerzy Kucia, Witold Giersz and Daniel Szczechura.

O!PLA Ogólnopolski Festiwal Polskiej Animacji [O!PLA Polish Animation Festival]

Created in 2013, O!PLA is the youngest and perhaps the most innovative amongst Polish animation festivals. It is also interesting in terms of its educational potential.

The festival was started by Piotr Kardas, a cultural manager from Lodz and graduate of film studies from the University of Lodz. In 2008–2010, he was the programme and artistic director of the Charlie cinema; he also served as the programme director during the first two editions of the Se-Ma-For Film Festival (Pol-skaanimacja.wordpress.com). The initial idea of O!PLA was simple: to promote

Polish animation locally, i.e. within the country. Contrary to many other festivals, O!PLA is not so much concerned with propagating the commercial appeal of Polish animated films (the business factor being one of the crucial aspects of field-configuring events). It is rather about presenting animated films in all regions of the country, while encouraging local inhabitants to participate in organising screenings. O!PLA thus decided to refer to the tradition of travelling festivals but in a slightly modernised form. The festival goes against the idea of a stationary event, largely relying (as Rülting [2009] points out) on having fixed headquarters, so useful in terms of visual identification and getting organisational support. In every town visited by O!PLA the entire festival programme is presented, and all viewers are able to vote for the best films. In 2013, O!PLA visited 21 towns, then 44 towns in 2014, 51 towns in 2015 and 69 towns in 2016. Interestingly, the number of towns does not depend on the main organiser, because the festival is invited by various institutions (screenings take place in cinemas, cultural centres, schools, cafés, pubs and libraries) which take over most of the responsibility for organising the event. In this way, O!PLA encourages local communities to become involved in a national-scale project. Local hosts can feel appreciated, as all towns are equally important and have equal share of influence over selecting the winners. As a result, O!PLA brings the most recent achievements of Polish animation not only to large cities, but also to small towns and villages.¹¹ Significantly, O!PLA is a completely grassroots initiative. The festival does not receive any funding from the Polish Film Institute. Funds are collected mostly through crowdfunding (e.g. through the platform Wspieramkulture.pl). This does not mean, however, that O!PLA is detached from the film community. On the contrary – the festival remains in close partnership with other industry events, such as the abovementioned Stop-Trik and ANIMOCJE festivals. O!PLA activities are also reported by the SPPA (e.g. through publicising information about the upcoming editions), which proves that the industry is not divided based on the level of institutionalisation or profile of the events. O!PLA has its special yearly schedule. The cycle is inaugurated in early spring. In the following months, the event visits a number of towns, presenting films divided into seven categories: independent, off, video, animated rhyme (from 2014), foranima (from 2015; focus on formal experiments) and the Kids Have the Voice contest with films for young viewers. In late May/early June the Grand Finale is organised and all winners are announced. The Grand Finale is accompanied by special screenings, retrospectives, discussions, concerts and conferences (two so far). In the months to come, the winning films are presented across the country as part of The Best of O!PLA action. Simultaneously, the international project O!PLA Across the Borders organises screenings of Polish animated films in many places around the world (Kardas, Świetlińska, 2014).

The unique way in which O!PLA operates stems from non-institutionalised initiative and faith in the strength of Polish animation; the organisers believe that

¹¹ The full list of towns participating in the fourth edition of the O!PLA can be found on the festival's website: Polskaanimacja.wordpress.com.

the knowledge of animation is simply worth spreading. Piotr Kardas claims that “Polish animation is, was, and – I am sure of it – will continue to be one of the treasures of Polish, or indeed European, culture. We should be proud of it” (Kardas, Świetlińska, 2014). The founder of the festival would love his pride to be shared by not only filmmakers but also audiences. For this reason, O!PLA attempts to stimulate converging competence among regional filmmakers and festival participants (as Grzegorz D. Stunża explains, this means learning new practical and theoretical aspects of new media) through culture promotion (Stunża, 2012, p. 10). As Stunża and his colleagues point out, “Competence includes attitudes, knowledge and skills that can be used in social communication and the creation of modern culture. Such a definition allows us to avoid reducing competence to technicalities and remains open to its socio-cultural context” (Strunża et al., 2012, p. 11). This social context is especially important with respect to the O!PLA festival, designed in such a way that it enables this initiative, to use Dorota Reksnis’s words, “to move on and spread this joy of creation, encouraging people to participate in culture” (Reksnis, 2008, p. 12). The main emphasis is put on independence and spontaneity (with no lesser degree of professionalism), which is typical of grassroots initiatives.

Conclusion

Regardless of the variety of trends and events occurring within Polish animation and educational initiatives related to it, two essential elements are needed for animation to become an influential form of art. One of them is talented and dedicated people such as Weronika Płaczek, the organiser of ANIMOCJE, or Piotr Kardas, the creator of the O!PLA festival; the other one is the money necessary for organising events and producing new films. Insufficient funding still sets Poland apart from, for example, France or Ireland. It seems, therefore, that we need financial support from state and private institutions.

One very interesting aspect of Polish animation is the fact that it has only partially entered the field-configuring event mode. If we accept the definition proposed by Lec, Rülting and Puthod and agree that in order to serve the animation community, events promoting animation need to be large and efficient commercial and business ventures, it has to be said that few Polish initiatives (e.g. the Animator festival and the SPPA initiatives) deserve that name. Instead, many events have grassroots origins. This trend is most visible in the case of the Sejny Chronicles and the O!PLA festival. That is why instead of many individual events (or one leading event, as is the case of the Annecy festival for French, but also international animation) which could be labelled as field-configuring events, there is rather one heterogeneous film animation industry, which year by year attempts to negotiate more unified policies through the activity of the SPPA and involvement in various initiatives.

It is worth pointing out that for a couple of years now, Polish animation industry has been offering a growing number of events. In the last decade, festivals such

as the Animator, ANIMOCJE and O!PLA have been created and the StopTrik festival has spread to Poland. At the same time, the educational potential of this form of art has grown. A wide offer of workshops and conferences, though not always sufficiently publicised, allows any interested party to participate in the events. Among the participants are families with children looking for interesting ways of spending their free time (some workshops, e.g. Animacja dla każdego [Animation for Everyone], are profiled specifically to cater to these needs) as well as cultural managers trying to expand their competence and skills (e.g. the New Horizons Summer Academy). Thus, we can safely say that the circles forming around animation in Poland are large and varied. The industry and its initiatives are still transforming, however, and for this reason they certainly merit further research.

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Summary

The paper describes events which are focused on Polish animation, with special regards to their educational values. The thesis refers to the importance of the Polish Film Institute, higher education, film workshops and film festivals for Polish animations. The most important part of the paper describes animation film festivals. Film festivals are portrayed as the most extensive educational platform, because of which the whole paper centres on an understanding of the issue through festival studies. The author evokes theories of the field-configuring events by Bernard Leca, Charles-Clemens Rüling and Dominique Puthod. In the paper the Polish animation film scene is described as heterogeneous, however, filmmakers who make animations are evolving a coherent vision of it. Helpful in this process is the Polish Animation Producers Association. In the final part of the paper the author focuses on O!PLA. The Festival of Polish Animation. This event can be interpreted as a something more than a field-configuring event, and described as a communicator of the convergence of expertise (term of Grzegorz D. Stunża and associates).

Keywords: film literacy, film education